

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Afghan Insurgents' Responses to
Changes in Moscow's Strategy: Two Scenarios [redacted]

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SUMMARY

This memorandum provides a speculative discussion of possible insurgent responses to major changes in Soviet strategy in Afghanistan involving two scenarios:

--a complete withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan,
or,

--Soviet adoption of an "enclave" strategy--for example,
concentrating forces at a few major bases--that is not
intended as a first step toward leaving the country. [redacted]

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If the Soviets withdraw completely, we believe political power in the largely non-Pashtun northern and western provinces would remain in the hands of major regional commanders such as Masood and Ismail Khan, although there would be some loosening of their control once the Soviet threat was removed. In the Pashtun-dominated provinces of southern and eastern Afghanistan, we believe the regional commanders would have to compete for power with tribal figures and returning refugees. The leaders of the Pakistan-based resistance alliance--except for Gulbuddin--would become irrelevant politically once the flow of arms from Pakistan becomes unnecessary, in our view. [redacted]

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Under the scenario of a withdrawal of Soviet forces to a few enclaves, we believe the major resistance field commanders would be strengthened politically and almost certainly would not reduce military activity. A Soviet withdrawal to enclaves would be widely interpreted by the guerrillas as a sign of weakness and would spur them to intensify their efforts against the Soviets

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and the Kabul regime. The absence of the Soviets from the countryside also would give field commanders greater scope for conducting a methodical development of their own political organizations. [REDACTED]

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We believe the Shia-controlled Hazarajat area of central Afghanistan will remain a wild card under either scenario. The Shia are likely to continue to fight amongst themselves, united only in a determination to prevent a Sunni-dominated Kabul from reexerting control over the region. [REDACTED]

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Scenario I: Soviet Withdrawal

Under this scenario, we believe political authority in Afghanistan would rest primarily with the major field commanders rather than the seven Peshawar-based resistance party leaders. Except for Hizbi Islami faction leader Gulbuddin --whose party is well established and organized--the alliance chiefs in Pakistan, despite their efforts at self-promotion, would become largely irrelevant to Afghan politics once they ceased to be the conduit for arms. In our view, the party chiefs could not count on the support of the commanders who were affiliated with them during the war. [REDACTED]

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In our opinion, most field commanders--even powerful commanders like Masood--would lose some of their political authority simply because they will have less call on their followers' loyalty without an immediate Soviet threat. We estimate the Pashtun commanders in the southern and eastern provinces will lose more personal power than will their non-Pashtun peers in the north and west. Although the war has weakened the traditional tribal structure of Pashtun society, we do not believe that it has been dismantled permanently. The absence of the Soviet threat and the return of large numbers of refugees who have maintained tribal traditions in camps in Pakistan and Iran, almost certainly will pit the Pashtun insurgent military leaders against returning hereditary, tribal, and religious leaders. Although we expect some non-traditional Pashtun commanders--especially Mullah Malang in Qandahar, Abdul Haq in Kabul, and Jalaluddin Haqqani in

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Paktia--to retain considerable political influence after the war, they almost certainly will have to share power with traditional tribal leaders. This could lead to an inherently unstable and violent political situation, perhaps, for a period of time, resembling contemporary Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Major non-Pashtun commanders such as Masood and Ismail Khan are likely to retain political leadership in the northern and western provinces, in our view. Both men have devoted considerable time and resources to developing their own political organizations during the war, creating a rudimentary social infrastructure that delivers some educational, medical, and agricultural services and will survive the war. They are also both charismatic leaders whose personal demeanor--especially their religious piety and reputations for evenhandedness--and military activities during the war won the allegiance and trust of diverse groups. Moreover, Masood and Ismail Khan will have a postwar advantage over the Pashtun commanders in that their Tajik, Turkmen, Shia, and Uzbek followers share a common desire to prevent a resurgence of the prewar Pashtun dominance over Afghan political and social affairs. This antipathy toward traditional political arrangements among the non-Pashtuns, in our opinion, will replace some of the "organizational glue" once provided by the Soviet occupation and will help to limit the sort of internecine fighting that probably will prevail in the country's Pashtun regions. [REDACTED]

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We believe these regional developments could lead to a situation in which postwar Afghanistan will be divided into Pashtun and non-Pashtun dominated regions roughly along the line of the Hindu Kush mountains. This postwar division is being facilitated now by the impact of the war, which is prompting many Pashtuns resettled forcibly in the northern provinces by the Afghan monarchy in the 19th century to return to their traditional tribal homelands along the Pakistani border. In our view, the northern, non-Pashtun provinces are likely to be moderately peaceful--although incidents of political violence, especially between Jamiat and Gulbuddin forces, will be quite common--and administered relatively effectively in the postwar period. The southern Pashtun provinces are likely to be characterized by far greater political violence and the return of a tribally governed society. [REDACTED]

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Control of Kabul

We believe Pashtun and non-Pashtun leaders probably will clash most sharply over the issue of who dominates the central government in Kabul. Although we expect the Kabul government to be weak and its reach limited in the postwar era, control over its administration will nonetheless remain--as it has throughout Afghan history--the most important and prestigious symbol of national political preeminence. Pashtun leaders will expect to reign supreme in Kabul as they have under monarchical, parliamentary, and communist systems of government since 1820. The

non-Pashtuns, on the other hand, will strive for at least an equal role in the Kabul administration as evidence that they no longer inhabit the lower levels of Afghanistan's ethnic pecking order. Given the well-armed and militarized nature of postwar Afghan society, and the fact that most insurgent parties are well established in the Kabul area, we believe that an armed battle for supremacy in the capital is strong possibility. []

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Whatever the ethnic composition of the postwar government in Kabul, it will be dominated by Islamists, in our view. The importance of religion in the government probably will moderate the historic insularity of the Afghans and could result in active support for other "Muslim liberation" movements around the world. Because Kabul is likely to be sitting on a mountain of weapons in the postwar period, the Afghan government probably will be tempted to assist other Islamic guerrillas--particularly in the Middle East--either with the excess arms at its disposal or through the provision of military training. We doubt, however, that Kabul's Islamic regime would seek to export its revolution in a fashion similar to the fundamentalists in Tehran. []

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In addition to being Islamic, we believe the postwar Kabul regime is also likely to be xenophobic. It will welcome international financial aid for economic reconstruction but will be hostile toward a large foreign presence--especially a Western presence--to administer the assistance. The Pashtun and non-Pashtun regions of the country will be largely autonomous, paying little heed to Kabul save for paying some taxes and acquiescing in the capital's day-to-day conduct of economic policy, defense issues, and foreign affairs. []

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In this decentralized political environment, we believe Iran, the USSR, and Pakistan would have ample opportunity to manipulate the country's diverse political groupings. All three governments have an interest in preventing the triumph of any single group in Afghan politics--Tehran to avoid Sunni persecution of the country's Shia minority, Moscow to preserve leftist influence and block the consolidation of radical fundamentalist power in Kabul, and Islamabad to defuse the Pashtun nationalist movement. []

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Scenario II: Moscow Adopts an Enclave Strategy

A withdrawal of Soviet forces from the Afghan countryside to a few major bases, in our estimate, would motivate the insurgents to keep fighting, ensure the continued political relevance of the Pakistan-based alliance leaders, and legitimize the field commanders' demands for loyalty from their followers. The Soviet presence would remain undiminished--albeit less far flung--and for that reason would remain the fundamental factor motivating the insurgency. []

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[redacted]

We believe that the insurgents would interpret a Soviet enclave strategy as an additional sign of Soviet-Afghan weakness. After the redistribution of Soviet forces, the guerrillas probably would first concentrate on attacking Afghan regime facilities and units left to fend for themselves in outlying areas. They would then begin applying pressure against Soviet bases with long-range weaponry and by further disrupting their lines of communication. We would also expect a substantial increase in urban warfare. [redacted]

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Politically, a Soviet withdrawal to enclaves would keep the alliance leaders' relevant because of the guerrillas unabated need for a continuing flow of arms from Pakistan. Such a Soviet maneuver would also, however, give the insurgent field commanders a more conducive environment in which to build their own political organizations. The absence of the Soviets from most rural areas almost certainly would allow commanders--especially those in the northern and western provinces who are already far along in the process--to be more thorough and methodical in building the infrastructure of their political organizations. In the southern and eastern Pashtun provinces, we would expect that the easing of Soviet pressure inherent in an enclave strategy would quicken the resurgence of tribal politics and intertribal conflict. In our opinion, however, neither the non-Pashtuns' building of political infrastructure nor an increase in Pashtun tribal rivalries would more than marginally decrease the overall military tempo of the insurgency. [redacted]

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We believe the chief political benefit accruing to the guerrillas from a Soviet enclave strategy would be the creation of an environment in which the postwar Afghan political system would be shaped and partially stabilized while the war was in progress. In our view, this situation would hasten the permanent creation of semi-autonomous Pashtun and non-Pashtun areas in Afghanistan and could result in a more stable and less violent political atmosphere within the two major ethnic regions during the immediate postwar period. If such a regional sorting-out process occurred during the war, however, we believe the postwar Pashtun-versus-non-Pashtun clash for control of Kabul would be more intense because ethnic leaders would have less need to devote time and resources to solidifying their own political bases. [redacted]

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